ONCE BOUGHT, ALWAYS BOUGHT.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 337. FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 15, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

A WONDERFUL MEDICINE.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

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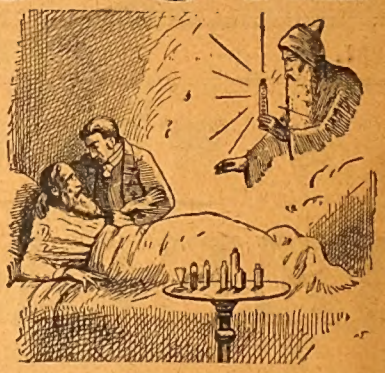

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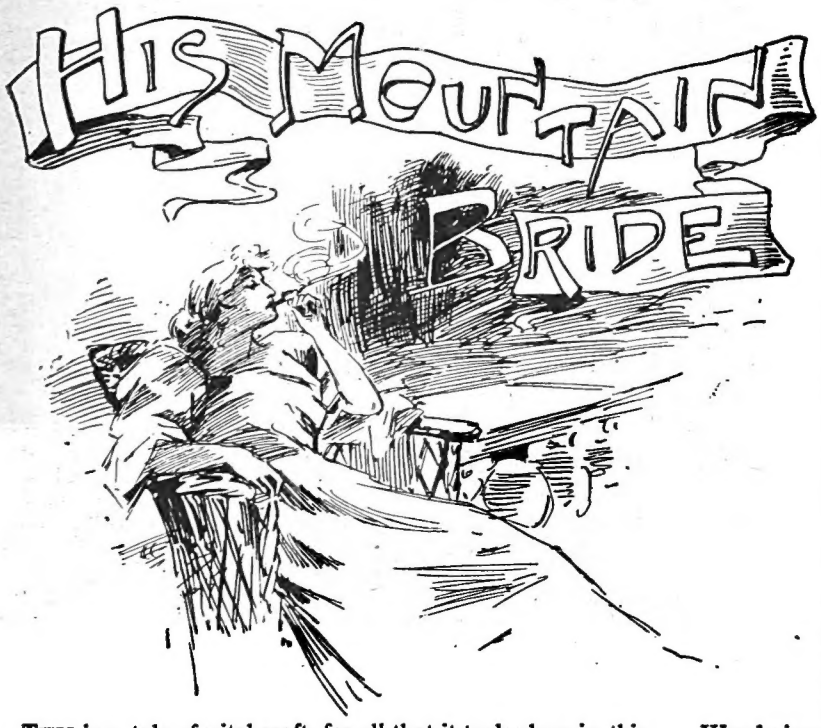

THIS is a tale of witchcraft, for all that it took place in this enlightened century.

Herzfeldt, of Trinity, and I were great friends, but I lost sight of him completely after he left Cambridge. A handsome clever Austrian, mad on athletics, and popular in proportion. Three years ago I met him again quite by accident during a long continental ramble I indulged in after being called to the bar.

It was in Vienna. Feeling rather seedy, I had gone to consult a famous doctor, when who should walk into the waiting room after me but Herzfeldt. I never should have recognised him, he was so incredibly changed; thin, worn, feeble—an old man before his time—but he knew me instantly and seemed delighted at the meeting.

He had come into his mother's property somewhere in the Theiss district of Hungary, and he was married: that was the great event, especially as it was comparatively recent. No doubt about its having been a love match. His haggard face flushed like a boy's over it, and it seemed a romantic affair enough from his account—a chance meeting in the Carpathians, while on a sporting expedition, with a child of those wild solitudes; love at first sight—anyhow on his side—a madness of love, which never rested till he had carried her off as his bride. He dwelt a good deal on her extraordinary beauty and attractiveness, but not a word about her family—a silence which I thought ominous in one of his proud race and from which I drew my own conclusions.

"Only the necessity of seeking advice about some strange symptoms, which of late have grown frequent, brings me so far from her to-day," he concluded, smiling; "we are still on our honeymoon, though full three months married."

On my summons to the consulting room, which here interrupted us, I agreed to wait for him till he, too, should be dismissed. This was not, however, until so prolonged a delay that I began to lose patience; but the look on his face as he emerged at length froze remonstrance and even inquiry on my lips. He took my arm mechanically, and walked out of the house like a man in a dream. After we had paced half the length of the street he suddenly halted and looked at me.

"He gives me a year," he said quietly.

I stared at him. "Good gracious! what do you mean?"

"It is the heart, of course," he pursued after a while in a more natural tone. "Let us go down this way; I am bound for the chemist's, for the making up of a certain recipe which the doctor says may save my life—for the moment, be it understood—when the symptoms reappear, and which, in consequence, he says, I am never to be without. I am sorry to have victimised you with this business, Fraser, yet I am selfishly glad to think some friendly soul knows my secret. Of course," half to himself, "I cannot tell her."

"Why not," I exclaimed impulsively; "it is surely her right to know her duty——"

"You cannot conceive what nonsense you are talking," he interrupted, with a curious outburst of irritation; "you Englishmen would judge all women by your own wives and mothers——." He checked himself abruptly, as he caught sight of my amazed countenance, bade me a hurried and careless good-bye, and left me.

Wondering, and not a little chafed, I stood and watched him. Half way across the street he paused, hesitated, and finally came back.

"We are at Csendiak, my country place," he said with some constraint; "do you think you could shortly spare a few days to visit a man with one foot in the grave?"

The invitation was not pressing; but I saw in his eyes that he would like me to accept, though there was something in the background which made him doubtful. At once I jumped at the conclusion that he was jealous of his young wife, and I confess I thought it unworthy of him. Yet under the circumstances, I could not refuse, and was glad of it, for his mysterious manner had piqued my curiosity. He wrote all the necessary directions on his card.

"You will come, then," he said; "that is well. Our first visitor." But there was still the doubt and wistfulness on his face. Then we again shook hands and parted.

Well, to cut a long story short, after a week I landed at Szolnok, the station Herzfeldt had indicated, late in the afternoon. There I found a mail-phaeton, two splendid horses, and a villainous-looking Hungarian in picturesque attire, waiting to convey me across the remaining fifteen miles of that unkempt, desolate, yet rich country. The autumnal air was hot and damp, my conductor taciturn; we had gone some two-thirds of the way under these cheerful circumstances, and I had fallen into a somnolent state, when I was suddenly aroused by the sound of what seemed a mad gallop behind us.

We were traversing a wide plain absolutely denuded of habitation, wreathed with rising mists and strangely dreary under the fading sky. There was still a broad belt of orange light in the west, and as I looked back I saw, blackly defined against it, the image of a woman on horseback. She was

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She passed out alone.

urging her steed with weird little cries as of some wild bird; in a flash she was upon us, and in another flash was gone.

As she passed she looked back at me over her shoulder and I caught a glimpse of a perfectly white face, heavy yellow hair and extraordinary luminous eyes. Her look struck me—I can use no other word—like a blow.

My driver gazed after her imperturbably, as if Valkyries on the ramparts were an accustomed sight; but my curious questions he could not, or would not, understand. So with the strange image imprinted in my brain, and passing and repassing before me in the gathering gloom, I was forced to reserve my curiosity for Herzfeldt.

It was quite dark when we reached the house. My host was at the gate awaiting me and his welcome was of the warmest.

"I was grieved not to be able to meet you and drive you back myself," he said, as he brought me to my room; "but I could not risk it." The grey pallor of his face, the marked change for the worse in the whole man, even in the short time since we had met, gave melancholy weight to his words.

"Now, do not trouble to dress," he went on rapidly, with determined cheerfulness; "my wife is already expecting us in the dining-room."

He conducted me through the house—typically Hungarian; sumptuous, vast, comfortless and unhomelike—to the dining room, which was as large as a church; there, standing under the full light of the lamps, I beheld the Valkyrie of the road, and I felt a disagreeable shock at the discovery that she was Herzfeldt's wife. Why, I should have been puzzled to explain.

Herzfeldt addressed her in German, the only language in which we could all three meet.

"Hedwig, this is my old friend. Bid him welcome."

She favoured me with a hard stare and stretched out her hand, with the one word: "Wilkommen."

As we sat down and the meal began, I could not help examining her with a curiosity nearly as open as her own. She was not by any means the extraordinary beauty I had expected, yet hers was a strange personality, and one which I could not meet with indifference, which from the first affected me to the most inexplicable extremes. Strongly built, but perfectly proportioned, a skin of opaque changeless pallor on which the scarlet lips made almost too vivid a spot of colour; light grey-green eyes, which each time gave me a fresh surprise when I fell under their scintillating glance, and coils and coils of dead yellow hair wound round a curiously flattened head.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic was an air of intense but repressed vitality, of being ready to spring, behind movements of languorous softness, that reminded me indifferently or rather collectively of a cat and a snake. She spoke in a low drawl, broken now and then with loud inharmonious resonances.

That night, however, for the most part, she was silent. Herzfeldt, on the contrary talked a great deal with a forced jovialty unlike the real man and in painful contrast with his state. At dessert the conversation turned on riding.

"It is almost our whole life here," said Herzfeldt; "but just now my rheumatism obliges me to abstain or we should have had some lengthy expeditions together." He gave me a sad look of warning as he spoke. "We shall enjoy our gallops together, shall we not, Hedwig? It was horrible to have to let you go alone to-day!"

Her answer was a curious one. She first leant her elbows on the table, and looked at him with a broad, incomprehensible smile: then taking a cake in both hands tore a bit off with her teeth, and flung the remainder to the great slate coloured hound which sat beside her.

Revolted, I glanced at Herzfeldt—the soul of refinement. His eyes were bent on his plate and his face was set as if in some mental or physical struggle. Noisily pushing her chair away, my hostess rose. She looked at me when I opened the door, as if expecting me to accompany her, but Herzfeldt showed no sign of moving, and I took it for granted that we were to adopt the English custom. With an angry movement, she passed out alone, swaying her body from side to side in a way which again made me think of some unknown animal combination.

I am not going to describe my whole stay at Csendiak, but will merely touch on such scenes as form, so to speak, the stages of that episode The next, then, was on the third day of my visit. We were all three on the terrace whiling away a hot hour with pistol-shooting. Herzfeldt's wife, a cigar between her lips, lying back in a wicker chair, her shapely feet in her untanned boots, resting on a high cushion, was basking after the mid-day meal in her cat-like way, and watching us with lazy intentness.

I made a brilliant score—I happen to be rather a good hand at a carton; pistol shooting is a lost art among us, but I have had opportunity to cultivate it in Paris; but Herzfeldt shot wretchedly, and that after long aims. Once or twice he had to lower his hand, which trembled visibly. After a few attempts with a look of discouragement, he gave it up. It was pitiful to see that he felt humiliated before his wife.

"A complete break-up, my boy," he said in English, with a sad smile. On her face there was a light of amusement. Not wishing to prolong the scene, I was replacing the weapons in their box when she got up.

"Once more!" she said. "I like to see you aim so quickly and shoot so straight."

Obediently I lifted my hand and this time carelessly missed.

"All luck, you see," I urged, anxious to cover Herzfeldt's vexation; "won't you let me rest on my laurels? As for Herzfeldt, he is out of condition; when he is himself he can beat me."

But Herzfeldt here interposed, irritably bidding me talk no nonsense, and go on shooting without further mock modesty.

"Yes, one more for me," repeated my hostess musingly; "what shall it be?" Then, with her broad smile, "I know," she said, unfastening the gold brooch at her throat and in her swinging,

Fixed the pin in the bark.

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She had glided from me.

swaggering way stepped up to an old tree and fixed the pin in the bark.

Herzfeldt frowned. "My last present," he muttered. "Never mind, Fraser, bring it down—shiver it!"

I felt her eyes on me as I raised the pistol towards the tiny, glinting spot. To my own astonishment—for I had fired almost unconsciously—the ball grazed the trinket and sent it spinning upward.

Without a word Herzfeldt went to look for it, and laughing, I turned round to his wife, to meet her eyes still fixed upon me with a gaze that suddenly appalled me.

Her scarlet lips, her glass-green glance were full of an odious, satisfied significance which I could not—dared not—put into shape, even in my most secret mind, for the horror of seeming privy to it.

"Thank you," she said to me after a moment; then she took her brooch from her husband's hand and walked away. Half angrily, half sadly, he looked after her, while I in vain endeavoured to shake off the strange unreasoning dread left upon me by the sorcery of her eyes.

I was beginning dimly to understand the nature of Herzfeldt's infatuation for her, since I myself, cool headed though I be, was unable to escape her strange influence. For the rest of the day and the whole night afterwards, sleeping or waking, I was haunted by her image, though when away from the inexplicable attraction of her actual presence the spell immediately changed its character and my unwilling mind dwelt on her with no other feelings but those of horror and disgust.

Under these circumstances, finding all my reason and philosophy of no avail, I rose the next morning, with the intention of curtailing my visit as much as I could without hurting Herzfeldt's feelings. But fate itself intervened—the next day was destined to be the last I spent within those gates. A ride had been arranged for the purpose of showing me the pride of the estate, an imprudence which I feared for Herzfeldt, who daily looked more shattered. But a certain irritability he had of late displayed with me kept me from remonstrating.

At the appointed hour, however, two horses duly made their appearance, and the groom handed me a note. "I dare not go out to-day, you understand, yet would not disappoint her," he ran; "invent some excuse for me, and have your ride."

Even as I finished reading, his wife came out of the house. In a sort of abstraction and totally unheeding my explanations, she walked up to her black Bessarabian and planted a kiss in each fiery nostril. Then accepting my ministration with seeming unconsciousness, her arched foot with its glittering spur scarcely pressing my palm, she sprang into the saddle with some wild Eastern exclamation.

Immediately the animal reared and plunged, while, in fear for her, I held its head as firmly as I might—and now an ecstatic look came on her face, the lazy eyes shot brilliancy, the red lips parted. Suddenly, with a rage of impatience, she cut at me with her whip: "Let him go—let him go!" she panted.

In an instant the brute broke away, shot across the courtyard, rose like a bird to the stone wall and disappeared. Hurriedly I mounted, and in his turn, my horse, quivering with fury at being left behind, darted after his companion. I gave him his head and before long had rejoined her; she had settled down to a canter, awaiting me; as I drew near her she looked round with a silent smile, but no sooner were we abreast than, with another weird cry, she spurred on again, and away we fled at a tearing gallop.

How long the enchantment lasted I can hardly say; gradually our wild steeds slackened pace; panting, covered with foam, they at length fell into a walk.

"This is life!" said one of us—whether she or I, I never knew. I looked at her. She was breathless; the heaviness of exhaustion lay round her eyes; then I, too, felt unaccountably broken with fatigue, a chill crept over me, and in that second, as if a chasm had opened before me, I saw my danger.

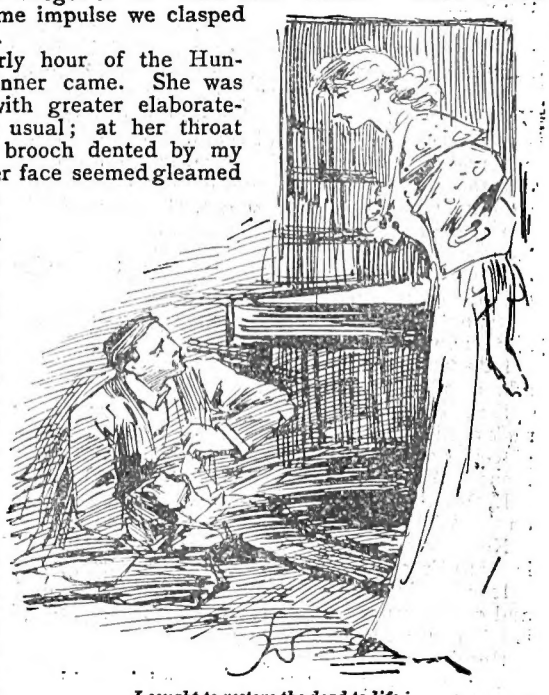
"We must go back," I cried in a toneless voice; trembling like a craven, conscious of but one clear thought—the imperative necessity of my instant departure. I turned my horse's head homeward. She followed me; she spoke to me; I cannot remember what I answered, or if I answered at all. The spell was broken, the glamour had faded. In silence we reached the house. I dared not glance at her. I was afraid to help her to dismount; I sprang from my horse and rushed indoors. As luck would have it, in the hall I found a letter awaiting me, which I seized upon as a pretext, and straightway sought my host.

"I have had news which necessitates my leaving you," I said. "Can you send me to the station to-day?"

He looked at me with a sudden awful suspicion, but when our eyes met, his face cleared.

"There is a train at ten o'clock," he answered simply; "I shall order Gregor to be round after dinner." Then moved by the same impulse we clasped hands.

The early hour of the Hungarian dinner came. She was dressed with greater elaborateness than usual; at her throat the little brooch dented by my bullet; her face seemed gleamed more weirdly white, her lips more scarlet, her eyes greener. Beset as I was by conflicting emotions, her presence tortured me. I scarcely looked towards her—I dreaded to meet the strange meaning



I sought to restore the dead to life

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smile which, by the very side of my dying friend, appeared to claim my complicity in the terrible thought that prompted it.

After my meal I took an early opportunity to escape to my room and don my travelling gear. When I came down again the great hall and the adjoining apartments were deserted. Thinking the husband and wife were together I forbore to seek Herzfeldt, and fell to pacing the length of the ill-lighted dining room from end to end. Presently the valet, carrying my portmanteau, paused at the door, to tell me the carriage would soon be round. With an impatient sigh I resumed my march.

Then, in the gloom and chilling silence, an uncomfortable impression of being watched stole over me, and gradually, as if drawn to it, I met the gaze of two shining eyes fixed on me in the darkest corner. It was the woman again.

She advanced softly into the light.

"You dare to go! Coward, you are running away!" She spat the words at me in a fierce whisper. I felt that I was falling into her power again. My mind—I cannot express it otherwise—was seized with trembling. As to what followed I have myself but a vague knowledge. Her hand fell on mine. Mine must have been icy cold for her touch was burning. Her gaze encompassed my whole being, and before I could grasp at my intelligence and save my good name the lithe gorgeous form was in my arms. As in a dream I could not measure time, but the madness cannot have lasted a second. My arms had barely closed round her when with an angry movement, like a snake disturbed, she had glided from me, and at the sound of a voice the thrall fell away with a rush like that of a torrent from my brain. I came to an awful awakening.

Yet the voice was neither loud nor menacing.

"Could you not have waited?" it said quietly. "It would not have been for long."

Thrilled to the marrow, I looked and saw Herzfeldt—my friend—my host! His face was ashen; his eyes shone with phosphorescent light; he was smiling. It was horrible. Then slowly he went away.

At that moment came the sound of carriage wheels at the door, and my first impulse was to fly at once from the accursed place; but as I turned into the hall the hateful vision of Hedwig arrested me on the threshold; silently, with a significant gesture, she fingered the broken trinket at her throat and vanished.

My mind leapt to her evil meaning, but with a widely different conclusion; the thought of seeking death before Herzfeldt's pistol came almost as a relief.

Like a madman I rushed down the passage and burst into his study. From the threshold the pungent smell of the drug seized me by the throat. He was sitting alone, panting, with his nails dug in his breast. When he saw me he smiled—an awful smile of contempt—through the agony of his seizure.

"You see," he said, in broken words that ended in a hiss, "I have spared you even the trouble of shooting me."

Then, gasping convulsively, with the grey circle of death already round his open mouth, he fell forward on his face.

As with frenzy I sought to restore the dead to life, light footfalls fell upon my ear, and she, who was as truly her husband's murderess as she was the murderess of my honour, came into the room. I sprang to my feet. Once more I looked upon her, saw the flash of satisfaction behind her first glance of mere curiosity, met the infamy of those eyes as they met mine, and my head reeled. But the spell was now one of pure horror. She barred my way and would have spoken. I struck her from me and fled. I heard her cry out in strident contempt, "Fool!" And the cry pursued me as I leapt into the carriage and was whirled away into the night.

A WILY WIDOW.

FRED HAWTHORN was a man about town, in every sense of the word.

The proverbial silver spoon had been born with him, and now, at the age of twenty-five, we find him a confirmed bachelor, with more money, perhaps, than brains.

A very desirable catch, thought the dames of West Kensington with marriageable daughters, and many a siege was made for poor Fred's banking account. But our hero was cold and callous to their winning ways, and, while admitting his devotion to the fair sex, would not enter the net of the snarer; so, day by day, month by month, Hawthorn lived his life, with a modicum of the vices attendant to a man about town. The monotony of routine bored him, however. 'Twere a great pity he had not taken up a profession, if only to cut short the tedious hours of the day. Small wonder that the card tables knew him as a regular attendant; the racecourse recognised him as an energetic plunger.

Lately a series of reverses in matters monetary had not added to his good humour.

He sits and muses as to his next move; to get out of the ruck of his hum-drum life, he will clear off to a little country place for a few weeks' fishing? Yes, a good idea! No sooner thought than done, and Fred is in the depths of Bradshaw.

Eventually he desides on the little fishing village of W——— on the Welsh coast.

Next morning his portmanteaux are packed, and Hawthorn is off to Euston and catches the midday train.

It is late in the night when he arrives at the outlandish spot, and on inquiring finds the small and only hotel in the place is filled with a large fishing party.

Here's a nice dilemma!

The obliging station-master advises him to try Mrs. Keeble's lodging-house, on the Parade—"and very clean and comfortable you'll find it too, sir!" he adds. Hawthorn is too dog-tired to cared what kind of diggings form his rest for the night, and, bundling his boxes into a ramshackle old cab, drives off. Happily there are rooms to let at Mrs. Keeble's, and, although they are primitive, the station-master has not erred in describing them as "clean and comfortable." Hawthorn turns in between the sheets of the small bed and sleeps on until the next morning is far advanced, the sun high in the sky: he breakfasts in a small parlour overlooking the sea, and eats heartily and with a relish quite novel to him.

Later on he strolls out to the shore and goes for a sail, and, while skimming across the water, experiences the peace for which he has longed.

That evening, he dines in the best and largest room attached to the Keeble establishment, and again experiences satisfaction from the fact that no member of the opposite sex is staying in the house, the only other visitors being two old enthusiasts who have come down for the excellent sport to be found in the neighbouring trout stream.

For three whole days Hawthorn lives a life of Arcadian ease and simplicity. He rises early in the mornings and driving over to the abode of Mr. Trout, sits for hours, his pipe between his teeth, indulging in the pastime that Walton loved. Then home to late dinner, finishing up with a cigar and cider at the Railway Inn.

On the fourth day a shock is awaiting him, for, on his return home, he stumbles over two large boxes, clumsily placed in the hall. His eyes catch the name on the labels of the boxes, "Mrs. Marchmont," at the same moment his ear catches the *frou frou* of a lady's dress in the room beyond. Hawthorn is in a bad humour when he comes down to dinner. To add to his chargrin he finds the new comer already seated at the table with the two old fishermen. He goes through the menu

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in silence, but curiosity prompts him to take sly glances at the unconscious intruder.

She is rather pretty and attractive—that he is bound to admit—with hazel eyes, a mass of golden hair loosely coiled about her head, and a complexion that many a country lass would enjoy.

But Fred has determined to eschew the female sex, at least for the time being. He moodily finishes the meal, and, without regard to that etiquette due to the presence of a lady, walks off to the Railway Inn, where he remains till closing time, indulging in the first fit of bad humour since his arrival at W——.

During the remaining days of the week, Hawthorn sees the lady at intervals, and, although they have broken the conventional ice and spoken, has been barely civil to her.

On the Sunday night he sits reading in his bedroom until the drowsy god catches him up, and he undresses and goes to bed. He has just dozed off, when he hears a voice, close by his bedside, that brings him back to the world, wide awake.

"Dear heart," the voice is saying, "have you no consideration or kindly feeling for me? Are we always to be as strangers? Will you for ever refuse the love I long to shower upon you? One kind look, a word, or a smile would tend to ease my aching heart. My love, my love, why will you not come to me?"

Instinctively, one of Fred's arms comes out from beneath the bedclothes and waves about in the vicinity of the bed, but grasps nothing but air.

Yet he could swear "she" is in the room, for he has recognised her voice. Hastily he lights the candle and searches round, but the room is empty.

Shall it be confessed that he even goes down on his knees and peers under the bedstead! He remains as one dazed. What does it all portend? Is it possible that something not to be realised has drawn him to this woman? He will go to bed and sleep it off.

Scarcely is his head on the pillow than the voice again is heard:

"What mad regret is mine!—A love scorned. Why did you come across my path to make me love you?" and then comes the sound of a woman sobbing.

Hawthorn lies in bed trembling and perspiring, scarcely daring to breath.

Every minute he expects to hear the voice recommence, but all is silence now, and eventually he drops asleep.

The next morning, on going down to breakfast, he learns that the young widow has gone out for a drive across the Cliffs. What is the reason of the regret he feels—the suspicion of a longing to see her?

He ruminates all the day through, and actually feels glad when the dinner hour arrives. "Will she be there?" he wonders. "Will anything have happened to keep her away?"

He is not to be disappointed, for on entering the dining-room he discovered his divinity seated in her usual place, radiant as ever, and looking even more beautiful, as Fred thought.

She smiles upon him as he takes his seat, he in return inclining his head, feeling too agitated to speak.

All through the meal he dare not look at her—feeling her gaze upon him, reading the thoughts of his very heart.

Dinner finished, he springs forward to open the door as she rises to leave the room, receiving for his pains a sweet smile that causes his heart to throb at a high rate.

That night he goes to bed, very wakeful, awaiting the mysterious voice.

At last it comes.

"My love, my curly-haired handsome boy, you have made my heart so glad. You have smiled on me! But, have I found your love—for which I pine? See, my arms are extended, hungry for your fond embrace—my lips ready to be pressed to thine. Take me, oh, take me, for I cannot live without you." A pause here—and the sound of a long drawn sigh; then, "Good night, fond heart, good night," and all is silence.

Fred lies awake thinking until the dawn comes. By that time he has decided on his course of action.

Yes, yes, he loves her; of that he is sure. She is the only woman in the world that can rouse such passions within him. He will see her in the morning and offer all he has in the world in return for her true love. Yes, he will not dare to fight against fate; and with relief in his heart he turns to the wall and falls asleep.

. . . . . .

At breakfast he meets the lady, and openly smiles at her across the table, causing the long lashes of her eyes to drop, while a blush mounts quickly to the pretty face.

Fred can scarcely tolerate the presence of the two old fogeys, who prevent him from having the desired *téte-à-téte*. She has gone at last, and he waits a decent interval, with the fixed intention of following her and pouring out the flow of passion cramped up in his system. Quite casually he dons his straw hat, and goes out on to the front, looking strong and happy in his new joy.

On the shore two young men are talking and laughing loudly, but at the sight of Hawthorn their merriment ceases, and they go on with their work of fitting up the sailing-boat.

Recognising one as the son of Mrs. Keeble, Fred walks over to them and enters into conversation.

"I say, John," asks Hawthorn, "can you tell me anything about that lady?" pointing in the direction of Mrs. Marchmont, who is sauntering along the beach.

"Oh, yes, sir, she is a widow lady who comes here every year"—and here the young fellow bursts into a violent fit of laughter.

Hawthorn has the greatest difficulty in keeping his temper.

The young boatman is quick to notice this, and expresses his sincere regret, with a hope of pardon. Then, as if by a sudden impulse, he blurts out, "I think I ought to tell you about that woman. Sir, she's a wrong 'un, and that's straight. She gave me a sovereign to fix a pipe from her room to the head of your bed, and I'm sorry now I did it!"

A light comes into Fred's eyes as he stands and stares at the young man. Then he finds his tongue, and what follows seems to give relief to the young man from town, for he strolls about the place for the rest of the day with a merry twinkle in his eye.

. . . . . .

Fred goes to bed that night with the set smile on his face.

This time he allows the candles to burn.

Evidently he is awaiting the voice—no longer mysterious.

At the right time, it comes.

"Dear love, I am unhappy to-night, for you have evidently evaded me. And but yesterday you were so kind, so loving towards me. Tell me, sweetheart, what it all means?"

Fred lifts himself on his elbow, tears aside the curtain at the head of the bed, and putting his lips to the end of a trumpet end, fitted into the wall, shouts at the top of his voice:

"Am I to be pestered every night in this way? Why don't you go to bed and give off that bosh under the clothes?"

A short scream and the gasp from a woman tells him the words have reached home. He pulls the curtain into its place, nestles down in the pillows, and snores loudly.

. . . . . .

The following morning, on going down to breakfast, Hawthorn learns that the widow has flown—a summons from a relative lying dangerously ill being the cause of her abrupt departure by the early train.

NOTICE.

NEXT week will be commenced in SHORT STORIES a splendid serial story by FREDERICK LESLIE, Author of "Lawyer Bell," "An Ideal Love," &c., &c. This story will be entitled

SINDBAD'S VALLEY,

and will be profusely illustrated by Mr. A. KEMP TEBBY.

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By John K. Leys, *Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c., &c.*

Illustrated by Raymond Potter.

CHAPTER XXIV.—*continued.*

The wind seemed to be still rising, but there was no sound from the sea.

"Come with me a moment," said Linton, going back in the direction of the house.

Geoffrey followed him.

As he went up to the house, Linton purposely made a good deal of noise. Immediately a loud cry burst on their ears. "Here! Help! Murder!" It came from the dining-room.

"I told you so!" cried Linton, darting past his friend into the house. "Those shouts might be heard on the beach. In any case, if anyone comes ashore, he is sure to come up here," he added as he made his way to the sitting-room.

"There, that won't hurt you."

"So that is the way you keep your parole!" he cried out as he opened the door.

Byngham's shouts ceased at once. He turned on Linton a look full of unsubdued ferocity. But Linton whipped the Captain's handkerchief out of his pocket, and, with its half, fastened a small stick of firewood between his teeth.

"There, that won't hurt you, or prevent your breathing," said the young man. "And, as for the unpleasantness of the thing, you have yourself to thank for it."

The two friends then hurried back to the beach. They were anxious to intercept the Captain's visitors, and find out from them, if possible, where Captain Byngham had meant to go that night, and what might have been his errand.

They had not waited long before a voice hailed them out of the darkness. Geoffrey answered; and presently they saw a boat manned by four rowers emerging from the gloom. The shore was well suited for landing, as the beach shelved rather suddenly, and the sea was not high enough to give much trouble, the wind being off shore.

"They will only expect to see one person," said Geoffrey in a whisper to his friend. "You had better go back to our lodgings."

"I will wait outside," said Linton, as he disappeared in the darkness.

Geoffrey guided the boat in, and helped to pull her out of the water.

A burly fellow who looked like an English seaman stepped up to Geoffrey, and said to him:

"Are you the man going on board the *Aphrodite*?

For a moment the young barrister thought he had committed a horrible blunder. What more natural, than that a boat from the yacht should be sent ashore for Captain Byngham, if he had been asked to make one of the yachting party?

"The *Aphrodite*?" he stammered.

"Ay," answered the man, with a short laugh, "the new *Aphrodite*, I may call her."

This was unintelligible to Geoffrey; but he answered, "No."

"Where is he? I thought you were a friend of his?" said the sailor.

"Oh, Captain Byngham you mean? I know him very well. Yes. He's not come down yet."

"So I see. Well, he had better be quick. The wind is getting fresher every minute; and it will be a tough job to get back."

"Oh, he's coming back, then, is he?"

"Of course he's coming back. Him and the young lady.

"It's too rough a night to land a lady in."

"That can't be helped. She's bound to come to-night."

Geoffrey's heart beat fast. He thought he had his finger now on the very pulse of the plot. He resolved to hazard a question.

"Is her father coming ashore too?"

Dark as it was, Geoffrey felt that the sailor was throwing a suspicious glance at him. The man's tone was full of suspicion as he answered roughly:

"No; I know nought about the old man."

There was more than suspicion in his tone. It was the voice of a man who knew more than he dared to confess, even to himself.

Just then the cold wind drove a hail of raindrops in their faces.

"Are you the man going aboard the 'Aphrodite'?"

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A small knot of men approached.

"I shan't wait out here any longer!" cried Geoffrey in affected impatience.

"You? Are you goin' with 'im then?"

"I was; but I don't know. It's beastly weather."

"I had no instructions about *you*."

"Oh, please yourself. I'm not anxious to go, on such a night as this especially. But I say, you might as well be under shelter till Captain Byngham comes back. I can take you to his house where the signal is—that's his house; and the moment he comes home you will know it."

"I hardly like leaving the boat."

"Leave the men with her, then; or—the tide's on the ebb—pull her up on shore a bit. She'll be right enough."

Still the man hesitated. Geoffrey was in an agony of suspense; but he kept his voice well under control.

"Well, I'm off," he said, moving over the sand as he spoke. "I don't see the fun of getting soaked here, when I might just as well be under shelter."

Still the seaman did not move, and Geoffrey was afraid to stay longer, lest the man should begin to suspect that his object was to get him away from the boat, and seat him comfortably in the kitchen of the Villa Carnot.

Just as he reached the garden-gate, Geoffrey ran back to the boat. The four men were stolidly sitting on the gunwale, waiting. He slipped a couple of francs into the hand of the man he had already spoken to.

"Captain Byngham is sure to come to the house first," he said; "and I will tell him you are here. But in case you should see him coming along, raise a shout to let me know, will you? I'll run down in a minute; for I want to see him before he goes."

The man promised he would do what was asked of him; and as he pocketed the francs, the last shade of suspicion disappeared from his mind. The rain was falling faster than ever, and the men were audibly grumbling when Geoffrey left them for the second time.

Linton, who had watched all that went on, met his friend at the door of the villa; and they exchanged a few rapid sentences. Then Jack Linton went off, to carry out the instructions which Geoffrey had given him during their hurried talk.

He had barely disappeared in the direction of Madame Fresual's, when the sound of footsteps was heard on the gravel outside. Geoffrey darted to a window. He could make out four lumpish figures in the darkness outside, hanging about the gate, as if uncertain whether they should advance or retreat.

Geoffrey hurried out to them.

"Better come round to the kitchen door," he said to them. "You can sit down there, and I'll serve you out a glass of grog."

The men touched their caps, and followed him.

The stove was lit in the kitchen; and though it could not dry the men's soaking clothes, the glow looked cheery and comfortable. In a few seconds the sailors—a rascally-looking set, as Geoffrey remarked to himself—were seated round it, each one with a glass of spirits in his hand. The brandy was Captain Byngham's. Geoffrey placed the bottle in charge of the leader of the party; and then saying that he was going to look for Captain Byngham in the town, he went off.

Instead of going to the town, however, he went straight to the boat and seated himself on the gunwale. The rain had made quite a small pool in the bottom of the boat. Geoffrey found the baling-can, baled it out, and then sat down again on the edge of the gunwale.

Of all the experiences he ever had, Geoffrey said afterwards, that was the most trying. It was a race against time. At any moment the trick might be discovered; at any moment the sailors might take it into their heads to return to the boat. Everything depended on the degree of good luck that Linton might experience.

The suspense became absolutely unbearable; yet nothing could be done—nothing. Sometimes Geoffrey would take a few hurried steps in the direction of the town, and stand bending his head to listen; but no sound other than the lashing of the rain and the loud moaning of the wind fell on his ears; and he was forced to go back to his place by the side of the boat.

Suddenly he started.

He had heard a low, undefinable noise, that told him someone was approaching.

A small knot of men appeared.

"Linton!" cried Geoffrey in a voice that trembled with anxiety.

"Right my boy. Here are Jacques and Ernest, and another fine fellow, all ready to go anywhere and risk anything in such a cause. And here are the things you wanted."

He handed Geoffrey a heavy ulster, a brandy-flask, and a revolver as he spoke.

"God bless you! I will never forget this!" cried Geoffrey, as he gripped for a moment, the hand of each of his new allies.

The boat, seized by five pairs of hands, was quickly run down to the water's edge. A minute later Geoffrey and his friends were pulling rapidly out to sea.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT HAPPENED ON BOARD.

"WE'VE missed her, Jack!"

"Aye; it looks like it."

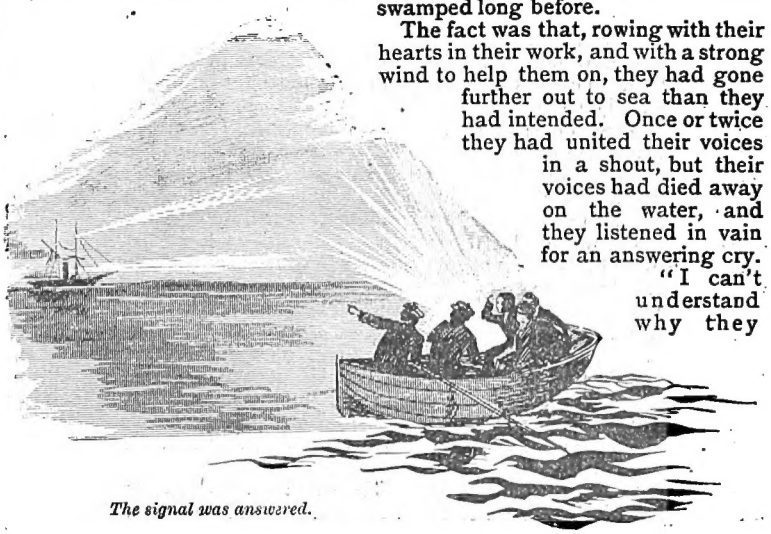
"What had we best do?"

"Turn her head round, and try the eastward."

The two friends had to shout at each other, though there was only the length of the boat between them. The tumbling waves rose higher and higher. Luckily, Fresual was at the helm; if he had not, the boat would probably have been swamped long before.

The fact was that, rowing with their hearts in their work, and with a strong wind to help them on, they had gone further out to sea than they had intended. Once or twice they had united their voices in a shout, but their voices had died away on the water, and they listened in vain for an answering cry.

"I can't understand why they



The signal was answered.

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"One word, and you are a dead man."

don't show a light," growled Geoffrey. "They must be expecting the boat back by this time."

"We ought to have brought a lantern," said Linton, "but one can't think of everything."

"Isn't there a locker of some sort under the seat, Fresual?" shouted Geoffrey. "Just see if there is anything there one can make a signal with."

The Frenchman opened the tiny receptacle, and found a blue-light.

"Hurray! That's the expected signal, no doubt!" cried Geoffrey. "Just set fire to it, Jacques; you understand these things."

In another minute or two a strong blue light was shedding its unearthly glare over the boat and the men in it, and the black sea that surrounded them. Before it had burned itself out the signal was answered. Away to the east shone out two white lights close together.

"There she is!" cried Geoffrey. "Give way, lads; we'll soon be on board of her!"

There, however, he was wrong. The most toilsome part of the work now began, for the wind no longer drove them along before it. But Frenchmen and Englishmen alike pulled hard, and soon the distance between the boat and the two lights sensibly diminished.

Geoffrey, meantime, had been forming something like a plan of action. The first point, of course, was to get on board the steamer. The next was to find out who was in charge of the yacht, and who had sent for Captain Byngham. Of course, there was a possibility that he was on a false scent. But the sailor had used the name *Aphrodite*, and what likelihood, Geoffrey asked himself, was there that any young lady would go ashore from the yacht at night under Captain Byngham's care, if all were well on board?

At all events he had now gone too far to retreat, and there was this consolation—if he had made a mistake no irreparable injury had been done, whereas if any plot against Sir Arthur or Leila was on foot he was doing his best to stop it.

One thing seemed plain amid the cloud of uncertainties. It had been clearly understood that no Hindoos except the Rajah were to sail in the *Aphrodite*. The presence of any Hindoos on board would be an almost infallible sign that foul play was being practised; and it would be war to the knife between him and them.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat. The black-hulled steamer was riding at anchor, her head to the shore. The boat drew up on her port bow, and swung round, Geoffrey, who was in the bows, catching a rope that was thrown out to him.

Thrusting his revolver into the breast pocket of his tweed jacket, Geoffrey clambered on board, Jack Linton following close at his heels.

When he reached the steamer's deck Geoffrey stood amazed. The ship seemed to have been deserted. Not a soul was to be seen. Linton's head was just appearing above the bulwarks, when Geoffrey heard a gentle footfall on the deck behind him. He turned sharp round, and met Chunder Sen face to face.

For one instant the Hindoo was speechless—dumb from terror. He had up to that moment believed that Geoffrey Dundas was lying at the bottom of a mountain tarn. For that second of time the Hindoo could not think. If he thought at all it was to struggle against the belief that a disembodied spirit stood before him. But that second of inaction was enough. Before he could recover his senses, much less raise an alarm, Geoffrey had caught him by the throat, and, by main force, dragged and pushed him down upon the deck. Another second, and the young Englishman's knee was on his chest, while a cold iron circle which the Hindoo well knew to be the mouth of a revolver barrel, was pressed against his temple.

"One word, one cry, and you are a dead man," said Geoffrey in his ear.

The Hindoo lay perfectly still.

"I say, Geoff," whispered Linton, "suppose this steamer belongs to the Hindoos, we should be in a pretty mess, shouldn't we?"

"Mind him, Jack; and shoot him like a dog if he so much as utters a sound," was all Geoffrey's answer.

"I'll risk it," said Jack philosophically; as, taking a revolver he had borrowed from Fresual, out of his pocket, he knelt down on the body of the prostrate Hindoo.

Geoffrey, amazed at the perfect silence on board, made for the cabin companion-way, and went down.

At the bottom of the stairs, suspecting a plot, he stopped short, and cocked his revolver.

"Is anybody there?" he called out.

A shout came from his left hand—and one piercing cry from his right.

Geoffrey recognised the General's voice; but for the moment,

Geoffrey fought like a madman

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he was deaf to it. He bounded in the direction of the cry he had heard; and gave a furious wrench to the handle of the cabin-door.

"Is that you? Are you there, Miss Chetwynd?" he said in a low whisper.

"Yes—oh yes, dear Mr. Dundas! We are prisoners here, papa and I. But now you are come we are saved! Oh, thank God—thank God, we are saved!"

As she uttered these last words, Geoffrey's arm was thrown round her waist, and she was swept bodily out of the cabin. The key had been left in the door to enable Captain Byngham to carry out the pretended rescue, and Geoffrey had only to turn it and throw open the door.

"Don't faint, please," he whispered to her. "Our work is not over, and we have not one moment to lose. If we alarm the crew we are lost. Where is your father?"

Leila pointed to the opposite door. She could not speak.

That door was locked, and the panels were boarded up. For a moment Geoffrey hardly knew what to do. It was impossible to leave the General behind, yet it was equally impossible to break open the door without spending so much time and making so much noise that discovery would be a certainty.

"Are you there, General?" he said, in as loud a voice as he dared to use.

"Good heavens! Dundas! I thought I heard your voice, but—How are you here? Have you got my daughter? Save her, Geoffrey, as you hope for heaven—save her! Never mind me."

"She is here with me. But the question is, how to get you out without raising an alarm."

"Have you a boat?"

"Yes, I have a boat manned by friends, but——"

"Then take Leila to it at once. I command you to do this. Don't hesitate for a moment."

"No, papa, no!" cried the girl. "I cannot go without you." She sank down on her knees as she spoke.

"Do as you are told, Leila! Geoffrey, take her away at once—Go!"

All this had been said in a few seconds; but seconds were precious. There was no time to wait longer. Geoffrey caught up Leila in his arms, and carried her up the steps. On the deck he saw Linton still kneeling on the body of the Hindoo. Fortunately, these two were concealed from the eyes of the crew by the engine-house. Geoffrey could make out three or four shadowy figures in the fore part of the vessel. If these men suspected for one instant what was going on, it would be all over. But they suspected nothing. It was exactly what they had been told to expect—an Englishman carrying the lady down to the boat.

The sea was running so high, that although the steamer partly sheltered the small boat, it was a very difficult thing to bring her near enough to get Leila on board of her. At last the boat was tossed right up to the bulwarks.

"Now jump, Leila!" cried Geoffrey in her ear.

She obeyed; and was safely caught by two pairs of strong arms, and laid down in the stern-sheets. The instant Geoffrey saw that she was safe, he sprang to Linton's side, and whispered a word in his ear.

Then he rushed down the cabin-stairs. The Hindoos and Lascars, supposing that he had gone to fetch a cloak or bag for the lady, never stirred.

Bang!—Bang!

They stared at each other for a moment, and then rushed aft; but Geoffrey and the General reached the top of the cabin-stairs before them. Geoffrey had blown in the lock of the cabin-door with two shots of his revolver.

The moment the Hindoos saw the two Englishmen they rushed up to them, and Geoffrey fired two more shots at them, wounding two men. Then he rushed forward, knocking down a third Hindoo with a blow from his left shoulder.

"Quick, Linton!" he cried. "Get into the boat, while I keep those fellows at bay!"

The Rajah . . . fell into the sea.

Linton sprang up, darted to the side, and threw himself over, hardly caring whether he alighted on the small boat or not. He was just on the heels of the General, who had made a leap for the boat the moment before. Both reached their mark, badly bruised, but not seriously hurt.

"I will kill the first man who touches me!" cried Geoffrey.

But the threat was useless. They rushed on him as one man. He pulled the trigger, but something had jammed—the revolver missed fire.

Then Geoffrey was desperate, and he fought like a madman. Seizing one man by the throat with his right hand he hurled him back on his fellows, and gained one second's time. In that second he had reached the side of the steamer, and had also turned the revolver in his hand, grasping it by the barrel. It served him for a weapon.

One Hindoo, who had raised a knife high in the air, went down as if he had been shot; another, who had caught him by the leg, received a blow on his hand which made him let go. He was almost free, when a third caught him round the neck. This man he managed to thrust away from him by main force. Then he vaulted over the side, intending to drop into the sea; but just then a wave carried the boat close up to the vessel's side, and he fell upon the heads of his friends.

"Now, lads, give way!" sang out Linton. One of the Frenchmen gave his oar a vigorous thrust against the side of the steamer, while the other two tugged hard at their oars. But it took a minute to get any way on the boat in the rough, tossing sea; and, if the Hindoos had had fire-arms, they might have shot down the rescued and the rescuers at their ease.

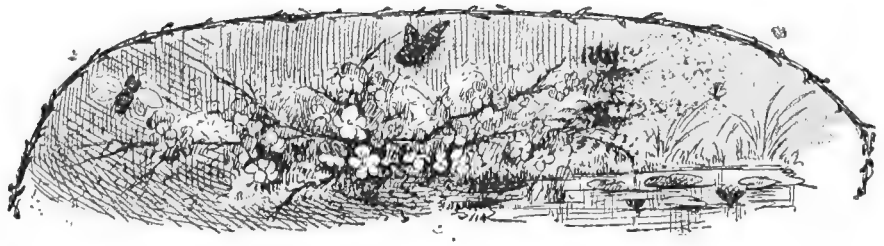
Just as they were drawing clear, a dark figure sprang on the bulwarks.

"Shoot him!" cried young Fresual.

"No, don't!" screamed Leila. "It is the Rajah!"

As he stood there, balancing himself for the spring, another dark form appeared behind him. The next moment the Rajah gave a cry, sank down, and fell into the sea.

(*To be concluded.*)



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THE KING OF DEATH.

HE had entered the marble passage leading to the boudoir of the Countess when the sound of heavy breathing and the soft patter of slippered feet on the tiles caused him to turn his handsome head.

It was Matuska, an old retainer of the Borisloffs, a wrinkled old woman, as ugly as a Hindoo idol, who carried herself with military precision despite her eighty years. She had nursed the Borisloffs for two generations; she knew of no other world beyond the boundaries of their estates.

To-night her face was flushed, her beadlike eyes gave forth a steely glitter, as she paused panting before the young man, and laid one wrinkled hand like the claw of a bird on his arm:

"Go back, illustrious *pani*," she stammered, breathlessly, "you must come here no more to see the Countess."

"And why not?" he asked, pulling idly at his black moustache, which drooped over his smiling mouth.

"Because—because," and the words seemed to stick in her throat, "last night when you were here, as I waited at the end of the passage, a shadow passed me. I am sure it was the Count—that he had been listening in the ante-room. You know the furious nature of Borisloff, even though you come to see the Countess as a simple friend. You know his mad adoration for his wife. Moreover, you know that in all Europe no one is so sure of aim as he with a pistol."

"Bah!" said the young man. "You mean well, I dare say, my dear Matuska, but I fancy you had been taking too much vodka when you saw the Count. He is far away in Moscow. Madame the Countess had a letter from him only yesterday. Go to bed. You are full of foolish fancies, old woman," and he shook her off and passed on.

Matuska leant against the wall and watched him disappear.

"There is a shadow on this house," she murmured, pressing her wrinkled hands together. "To-day the cross in the chapel fell from the altar. It is an ominous sign. But what is old Matuska to do to avert the calamity? Holy Father, if Borisloff has really returned!" and she glided down the passage in the direction the young man had taken.

In the meantime Loris had pushed aside the curtains and entered a large hall fitted up like a conservatory. The air was warm and perfumed, almost inebriating in its heavy fragrance. He did not announce himself, knowing well that he was expected. And he sat down in a fantastic chair covered with crimson plush, whose scarlet arms gave him the appearance of being clasped in the jaws of a giant crab.

The subtle fragrance of the apartment was conducive to dreams, but to judge from his face they were pleasant, as he smiled softly to himself and plucked idly at a blood-red rose that nodded its fragrant head towards him as a gust of warm air swept through the curtain.

"Loris!"

A flutter of skirts and the Countess stood before him.

He rose with a startled cry.

"How beautiful you are," he murmured, kissing her softly, almost reverently.

And beautiful she was indeed, as she sat down on a sofa covered with white fur, and motioned him to take a seat beside her.

She played with the filaments of the feather trimming of her gown as softly as a bird smoothing its plumage. As she sat there she looked like a spirit of the snow.

"Well, have you nothing to say to me?" she asked, with a little pout, turning her black eyes full upon him.

He started again.

"I was so intent on admiring you," he murmured, "that for the time I could find nothing to say. It seems cruel to be able to find only common words to speak to a goddess." Then he told her about Matuska and her suspicions.

"Poor Matuska," said the Countess with a laugh; "she is so devoted to our house that at times her fidelity oversteps the bounds. I hope, Loris, that her words have not frightened you," casting a quick glance at her companion.

"Frightened me?" looking up. "Oh, no. At the same time I should not care to meet Borisloff with a pistol in his hand if he mistook the nature of my visits."

"He must be a skilful marksman if he can send a bullet all the way from Moscow," laughed the Countess. "I heard from him again to-day. He will not return without letting me know," and her metallic laughter rang through the room, the glass walls of which gave it a bell-like sound, and roused answering echoes from the halls on either hand.

But what was that? The echoes did not die away; a harsh, growling sound was heard from the marble passage through which the young man had just entered.

The Countess heard it, too, and her face grew pale as her snowy gown. She had risen, and they stood listening, and at the same time regarding each other with dilated eyes.

There was a sound of struggling without, the clamour of angry voices, and one louder than all the rest pierced like a sharp sword the two occupants of the room.

"I will not believe it. You lie, you cat! I will convince you that you are wrong, and then you shall be knouted."

"My husband!" murmured the woman in white.

Then they heard the furious falsetto of Matuska.

"The proof is not wanting—here—here!"

The curtains were torn aside. The Count, his face flushed with evil passion, was pushed, half dragged into the room by Matuska. Behind them crowded the servants of the house, talking to each other in hushed whispers.

"Are you satisfied, Altesse?" cried the old nurse, pointing to the man and woman that stood silent in the centre of the room, stupefied by this sudden onslaught.

The Count was silent a moment. His face had resumed its calm expression; only his eyes displayed his anger.

"Take that woman," pointing to Matuska, "to the court-yard and flog her," said he to a tall mujick.

The old woman was dragged screaming away. With an imperious gesture Borisloff motioned for the others to follow.

"Now, monsieur," he said calmly, turning to Loris, "you need not attempt any explanation, for I assure you it would be useless. You may be innocent of any intent to wrong, but the publicity given this affair necessitates one thing:—that you should meet me in a duel. I have a right to kill you. Society would acquit me if I did, but I shall give you a chance for your life. I will believe you less guilty than you are."

"You are very considerate, I am sure," replied Loris, ironically, for though the sudden appearance of the Count had surprised him, he was far from being a coward.

"You may believe that this melancholy affair has turned my head," said the Count. "But I assure you that I was never saner in my life, when I propose a peculiar duel." He went over to a small table, and picked up a pack of cards. "Now, monsieur, we shall take our seats at the table, we shall play a game of *écarté*, the stakes—the life of the loser. You know I am an unerring shot, while you are but an indifferent one, so I wish that our chances should be entirely equal. If you lose, you will, as a man of honour, blow out your brains before noon to-morrow. If the game go against me, I shall do the same. Do you accept?"

"I accept," came the reply from the dry lips of the young man.

"Very good. For how many points shall we play?"

"Five."

The game was begun. The only witness was the Countess, who, attracted by a terrible curiosity, had drawn near the

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players, her eyes fixed on the gaily painted bits of cardboard on which the fate of two lives depended.

Fortune seemed to favour the Count. The game stood four to nothing. The face of Loris for the first time during the game grew grey and worn looking. He had bitten his lip, and a fleck of blood dropped down on the cards in his hand.

The Countess, whose hand rested on the table, was shaking like a wind-blown leaf. Her husband looked at her pallid face, and smiled.

"Give me the cards," he cried. "It is my deal."

The cards glided in and out through his white fingers as if animated with life. The silence was broken only by the sound of heavy breathing and the rattle of the woman's ringed hand on the board.

Even that ceased when he dealt; but as the last card slipped from his hand there was a crash.

The Countess had fallen at their feet.

He had turned the king!

A harsh laugh followed. Borisloff stooped and raised his wife from the floor. The young man made a movement to assist him, but the Count waved him off.

"No, no, she is mine now;" he murmured, "mine alone. The king decided for us. The king of death!" and he laughed again.

Loris stood hesitating in the centre of the room, surveying the limp figure of the Countess, which her husband had borne to the sofa. The dark face of the Count was now lighted by a triumphant smile as he leant towards her.

The young man, stifled by the heavy perfume of the room, with fire in his heart, felt a sudden weakness assail him.

"Before noon to-morrow," he murmured, and tottered unsteadily from the place, down the dark passage, and so into the street, like a man walking in his sleep.

The cool night air revived him, but, with the return of consciousness to the present, he was assailed with the horrors of his situation. He was not a coward, but he knew that he had been guiltless of wrong towards the Count: that a harmless flirtation, born of a woman's coquetry, had led him to sacrifice his life.

To-day he was happy-hearted, filled with the joy of living. To-morrow he would be a cold and pulseless thing, to be hurried to a suicide's grave. He was only twenty-five, and it was hard, very hard to die so young.

He half closed his eyes as he hurried along, dreading to look at the familiar houses and cafés that lined the avenue, lest the thought of all that he must leave might fill him with added anguish.

He knew that when he passed again through that highway now flashing like a double strand of diamonds with its myriad lights, it would be in a musty coach with sombre plumes followed by impatient mourners.

As he ascended heavily the stairs leading to his chambers, it seemed as if every step led him down into the abyss of death, and the pulsations of his heart were like a hammer rising and falling, beating out his life.

Wearily he entered his room, bidding his servant go to bed, asking to be awakened early on the morrow. He had no intention of evading his promise to the Count. He would kill himself before the clock sounded the hour of noon on the morrow.

The grey light of dawn found him still arranging his papers, writing letters to his friends. How surprised they would be to hear that he, the rich, *fêted*, well-beloved Loris Nudiolanski, had taken French leave of the world for good. They would talk about it a week—two weeks, perhaps—in perfumed boudoirs. Then Loris, the suicide, would be forgotten.

His last preparations made, he took out a pistol from his duelling case, cleaned it thoroughly, and put in a new cartridge. He made ready the other in case the first should fail.

"If I wait until broad daylight," he said to himself, "someone may arrive to prevent my taking my life. It is better to do it now before all the world is awake. While they are sleeping, I shall sleep, too."

He poured himself out a glass of brandy; it steadied his hand; there was even a flush of colour in his face as he raised the pistol to his head.

A report followed, filling the small room with a dense smoke. When the veil lifted, Loris was still standing. At his feet a man lay with his hand pressed hard against his breast.

"Borisloff!" cried Loris, scarcely believing that it was his old enemy that lay at his feet. "In Heaven's name what does this mean?"

"It means," gasped Borisloff, "That I got here—just—in time—to save you—to do justice. Remember—I died an honourable man. Here—take back your pistol."

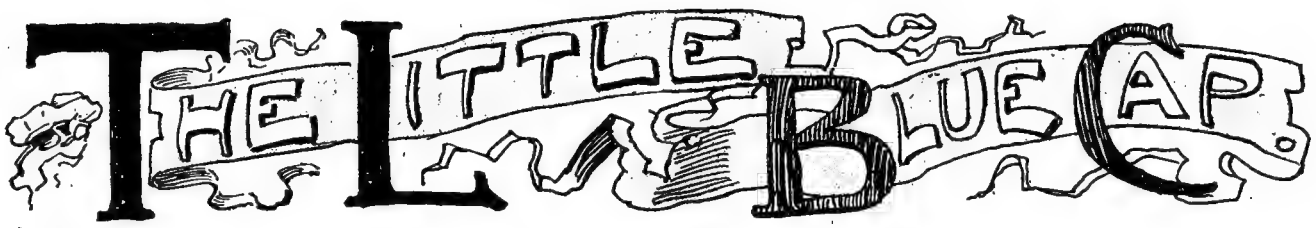
"But I lost. I was only carrying out my promise."

"You did not lose——" the dying man murmured.

"You——"

"I cheated."

And he rolled over dead!



I WAS paying a visit to my friends, the Durands. They were a simple, honest couple who lived near the banks of the river, in a tiny house, a mere bird's nest, almost hidden by wisteria and Virginia creeper. Durand's hands bore the marks of honest toil, for he had been a locksmith in his youth, and had by industry and economy raised himself steadily until he became the proprietor of a large business, and secured a competency for his old age. His wife, a quiet, gentle creature, worshipped her husband, and both of them wore on their faces an expression of serenity which betokened ease of conscience and a life of peace.

Durand was past sixty years of age, and his wife must have been fifty, yet, in spite of their wrinkles and grey hairs, these two treated each other with an affectionate deference which was a pleasure to behold.

While we were engaged in conversation just before dinner, Durand rose and opened a drawer to take out some trifle which he wished to show to me. While he was turning over the contents of the drawer, it chanced that a little cap, such as might have been worn by a doll, or an infant, fell to the floor. I picked it up, and noticed that it was made of coarse blue linen, with bits of twine instead of ribbons. As I handed it to him, I said gaily:

"Are you preparing a baby basket, Papa Durand?"

I had no sooner spoken than I regretted it, for I recollected at that moment having heard that the only shadow on my

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friend's life was the fact of their union being a childless one. For a minute Durand made no reply, but looked at the little cap affectionately; then as he laid it carefully away again, he said in a tone of seriousness:

"That is a souvenir."

Then we three sat down for dinner and talked of other matters, but as soon as the repast was finished, and the little maid-of-all-work had put cigars and liqueurs upon the table, my friend said suddenly:

"How much that baby cap reminds me of!" It was evident that he wanted to explain his remark, and I begged him to do so.

"It was a great many years ago," he said after a slight pause, "for I was about twelve years old. I was working in a large factory, and I had a companion, of the same age as myself, whom, on account of his ugly features, we nicknamed Zizi Monkey-face. He was a sly, thieving, mischievous urchin, very much given to filching tarts from the pastry-cook's counter, but a jolly little chap, and full of pluck. He was so lazy that he would have been turned out of the factory had it not been for the indulgence of the overseer, who had been a friend of his father's, and took an interest in the boy for the sake of his dead comrade. Monkey-face was an orphan, and the only relative he had ever known was the woman who brought him up, a cousin of his mother. This woman was a fish-peddler, a brawling, brutal creature, whose affection for her young charge was manifested only by blows. Perhaps if he had known a parent's love he would have been less perverse.

"One afternoon, the lad took it into his head to run away from the factory, and go vagabonding about with a gang of young ruffians like himself. As they were coming slowly home after nightfall, they heard, to their astonishment, the cry of an infant. The sound seemed to issue from a long, narrow, dirty alley which opened on the street, and at the other end of which hung a dimly flickering lamp. After a short consultation, the street boys ventured softly into the passage, and one of them espied, behind the door, a little bundle of rags which struggled and wailed. He seized hold of it, and the whole party ran into the street, triumphant, stopping under a lamp to examine their capture. It proved to be a baby girl a few weeks old, wrapped up in a series of dirty cloths, a poor little innocent whom a wretched, perhaps desperate, mother had abandoned to the charity of strangers.

"A council was held to decide what should be done with the booty, and the young captors gave free play to their mischievous imaginations. One wanted to put the baby back where they had found it; another, to hide it in a half-empty prune box which stood at a grocer's door; a third proposed to climb up to a second storey balcony and leave the youngster there, and how astonished the people would be next day! But Zizi Monkey-face scouted all these ideas, and declared that the baby must be given to the gypsies. There was a band of these people near by, who practised jugglery and fortune-telling, and instances of kidnapping were by no means rare.

"Monkey-face's decision was hailed with enthusiasm, and he claimed the right to carry the treasure-trove in consideration of his having made the plan.

"'Give us the kid,' he said. The baby had all this time been screaming piteously, but it stopped suddenly when Monkey-face took hold of it, and, while he walked along with an air of triumph, it fixed its great blue eyes upon his ugly face and smiled, at the same time stretching its tiny hands out as if to caress him.

"'She is laughing!' cried the boy in delight; 'see how she looks at me!'

"Then a new impulse seized him.

"'I will not give her away,' he said. 'I will keep her myself.'

"His companions protested indignantly, but in vain, for, as they well knew, Zizi Monkey-face had at the end of each arm an argument so strong that it would be useless, as well as unsafe, to oppose his wishes.

"When he reached home with his burden the fish-peddler exclaimed furiously:

"'Do you think I have not enough to do to fill your mouth, you lazy imp? Take that brat to the police—quick, now!' Pif, paf! A box on each ear showed the boy that she was in earnest, and he fled from the house.

"That night he did not return, and the next morning he was in the factory as soon as it opened, for the first time in his life.

"'Mr George,' he said timidly to the overseer, 'how much will you pay me if I work hard all day?'

"'I have already told you tenpence,' answered the man in surprise; and Monkey-face worked indefatigably until night. The overseer, amazed and delighted at the change, paid the boy for his work and even gave him tenpence in advance in order to encourage him.

"That night Monkey-face was again absent from his home, and his cousin, the fish peddler, went to the factory the next evening, lay in wait for him, and dragged him home in spite of his struggles, administering a thrashing on the way. But it was no use; as soon as the old woman turned her back to cook the soup for dinner, the boy slipped out of the house and did not return.

"The factory overseer having been informed of the state of affairs, made up his mind to settle the matter at once, by finding out where Monkey-face spent his nights, and for this purpose watched the lad as he left the factory. Mr George, in company with one of the workmen, followed the wanderer at a short distance, and observed him enter a bakery and buy a small loaf of bread; next he went into a dairy and came out carrying a bottle of milk, and then turned his steps towards a lonely, deserted quarter near the river. Suddenly his followers saw him plunge into a muddy alley; the place having no lamps was as dark as an oven, but Monkey-face was dimly visible as he stopped before a paling. The next minute he had scaled it with the agility of the animal which was his namesake, and was out of sight.

"The two men, determined to discover his hiding-place, climbed over the wall and found themselves in a large vacant piece of land covered with weeds and rubbish, but of Monkey-face there was not a sign!

"At last they espied in the farthest corner a low wooden shed which had evidently once served as a fowl-house, and through the cracks of which a faint light was shining. They approached it noiselessly and peered through a crack. Great was their astonishment. In the middle of the wretched hut, in which a man would not have been able to stand upright, sat the young runaway, a candle-end stuck in the ground beside him; he was gravely pouring milk into a feeding bottle, and in a corner, on a bed of dried leaves, a baby was sleeping soundly, wrapped up in an old blanket.

"Zizi Monkey-face transformed into a nurse!

"'What the dickins are you doing here?' asked the overseer, throwing open the door of the cabin suddenly; and the boy, startled at first by the intrusion, soon recovered himself and answered slowly:

"'Haven't I got a right to have a little sister?'

"Then, after a pause, he added grandly, 'I earn tenpence a day. That is enough for us both, and we don't ask anyone for anything.'"

The narrator paused, smiled softly and added:

"The next day the owner of the factory, being informed of the matter, raised my pay to one-and-eightpence — just double."

"What?" I cried. "It was you."

"Ah, I have betrayed myself," said Durand. "Yes, I was the young rascal who was in a fair way to come to the gallows, and, thanks to the blue eyes of that little girl, I became a good workman, and afterwards set up for myself. Now you understand why I kept that little blue cap; she had it on when we found her."

"And what has become of her?" I asked eagerly.

The old man answered: "We have never parted." Then, smiling, he looked at his wife and added: "Have we, my dear?"

She smiled in return, but her eyes were moist as she looked at him, and under her eyelids I saw a tear-drop glistening.

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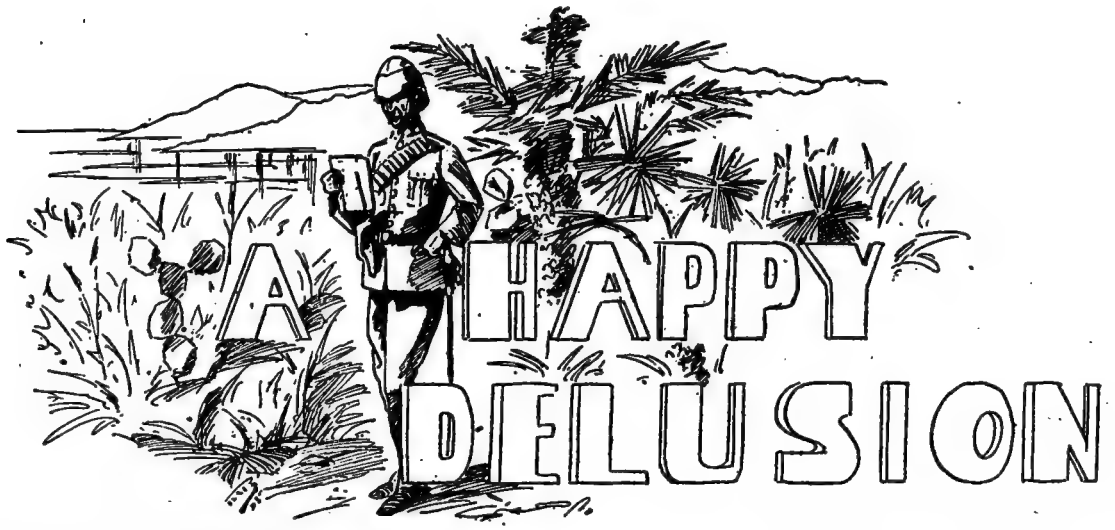
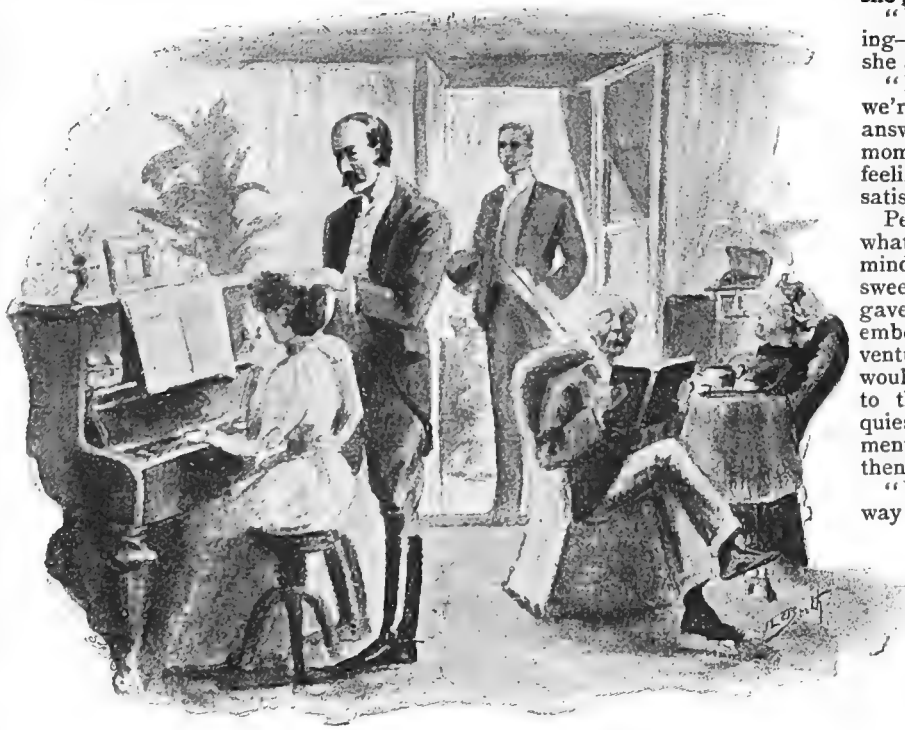


A HAPPY DELUSION

WHEN Lieutenant Skipton took the train for Portchester that August evening his heart had sunk somewhere near the bottom of his boots, for had not his regiment been ordered on active service? And even when the war scare in Egypt should be over, it was unlikely he would be able to return home for some time, for was it not next on the list for India? And so—well, it was not a pleasant thought, but he must pull himself together and face it.

He was going to say good-bye to Daisy Stuart, to look into her pretty eyes, and watch them darken whilst he told his news. She would be interested, he felt sure, but would that be all?

The stretch of dusty road from the station had never seemed so long and weary to Claude Skipton before. The air was full of sounds of the dying day, and fragrant odours from cottage gardens reached him; but he saw and heard nothing till he opened the gate of the Stuart's pretty house, and walked up the sheltered path.



He entered the little drawing-room unannounced.

Out of the French windows came the notes of Daisy's sweet voice singing. Claude paused in the verandah to listen. Ah! no more duets for them, he knew, unless——but would she? As the music died away he entered the little drawing-room unannounced. It was dark coming in out of the summer twilight, but he could see Mrs. Stuart slumbering peacefully in a chair, and the Colonel trying to read by the failing light, while at the piano sat Daisy, wearing a white dress, and somebody stood by her side—somebody who was tall and handsome, though possibly some twenty years her senior, yet who assuredly had his hand on Daisy's bent head, and who was caressing the pretty curls as Claude had never dared to do. Instinctively he felt the presence of a rival, and his eyes flashed as Colonel Stuart rather stiffly introduced "Lord Cantley."

Claude was not at his best, as he abruptly spoke of Egypt and his orders. Perhaps he wanted to cause that sudden start from Daisy, and that look, half wonderment, half pain, that she gave him.

"You will have fighting—I know you will," she said childishly.

"Possibly; that's what we're going for," he answered, and in a few moments took his leave, feeling strangely dissatisfied.

Perhaps she guessed what was passing in his mind, for she smiled sweetly at him as she gave him her hand, and, emboldened by that, he ventured to ask if she would not walk with him to the gate. She acquiesced, after a moment's hesitation, and then said:

"Why not go the field way? It is nicer."

They strolled across the lawn in silence, till Claude said: "I have something to show you," and drew from an inner pocket a small packet wrapped in white paper. It proved to be an opal, on which some hand had sketched the portrait of a pretty girl, with a sweet wild-rose face, and eyes like shady violets.

Daisy looked at it, saying simply, "This is meant for me, but it is much too flattering."

"It could not be that, darling," answered Claude.

He had not meant to call her "darling." The word slipped out, and he looked anxiously to see if she noticed it.

She bit her lip nervously, and turned her face away.

"Of course it is too pretty to be like me," she said naturally, "but I think you are very clever to paint so well,

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Lieutenant Skipton. I won't deprive you of it. You must keep it as a souvenir of our Portchester days."

She laid the little picture in his hands. He carefully wrapped it up, and replaced it in his pocket without a word. They had reached the little gate by this time. On the other side of it was a brook crossed by a plank bridge, and beyond that stretched the pathway across the fields. Daisy was the first to open the gate, and turned it idly to and fro. Then she held out her hand, saying:

"Good-bye, I must go now."

He took it, their eyes met; then she drew her hand away and would have left him, but his arm was round her.

"Daisy, Daisy, it must never be 'good-bye' between us."

He drew her closer, but she tore herself away, saying rather wildly:

"Don't, don't; it must be 'good-bye.' I am engaged to Lord Cantley."

Claude was petrified. They stood facing each other, she with bent head and nervously clasped hands.

"Don't say that, dear," said he, at last; "tell me it is not true."

"It has been true a long time," she answered.

"Then why did you not enlighten me before?" he exclaimed unsteadily.

"I couldn't," she whispered. "I thought you knew. I never guessed it would come to this, and——"

She paused.

"Do you love him, Daisy?"

She drew herself up with a quaint, womanly air.

"You must not ask me that. I am going to marry him." Then, with a pang of self-reproach at the pained look on her lover's face, she added, "We are poor, you know, and he is rich; and he will do such a lot for the boys; and Etta, and Mabel, and Charles, and Clarice can all come and stay with me. Mother wished it, and he is good and kind, and I——"

Then the brave little voice broke. She covered her face with her hands, and leant her elbows on the gate.

"I am poor," Claude muttered. "I can offer you none of these things."

Then he looked away across the fields, with a fierce hunger in his heart.

A red glow lingered in the sky, the pale crescent of the moon rose slowly, and the stars came twinkling out. A spray of honeysuckle from the adjacent hedge was blown down, and caught on Daisy's curls. Claude released it, and she, raising a very white face from the gate, once more extended her hand, and whispered "Good-bye."

She drew herself up with a quaint, womanly air.

"This is good-bye? It is only a dream, then, Daisy, and I must forget it?"

"Only a dream, but do not forget it."

They were her last words. One handclasp and the two had parted.

The spray of honeysuckle, faded and shrivelled, all the sweetness gone from it, as it had gone from his dream, was placed by Claude with the little portrait, and together they went with him to Egypt and thence to India.

. . . . .

Years passed. The dust lay thick and white at Mean Meer. The insufferable heat seemed to penetrate into every bungalow. In that of Lieutenant Thurstan, where the punkah was being briskly pulled over the poor young officer, as he lay wasted from incessant days and nights of fever, it was perhaps cooler. But the throbbing brain of the lad could think of nothing but the green depths of English woods, and the dainty loveliness of the girl he had left behind him. He fancied that if her small palm could but rest upon his burning forehead he should get well.

There was a clank of spurs on the verandah, and his chum and Captain entered.

"Well, my boy, how are you?" and tenderly as a woman the elder man shook up the pillows before he sat down beside the bed. He was fond of, and much interested in his junior subaltern, the latest joined fellow in the regiment, who had not been six months in the country before the Punjab fever had stricken him down.

"I've had an awful night, Captain. If this goes on there'll be those growling volleys shot over me in a few days. And I shouldn't much care, if it wasn't for her."

He jerked his head feebly in the direction of some photographs upon a small table beside him, which his senior had not previously noticed. Now his gaze was glued to them, and he did not attempt to cheer the poor boy.

"Who's that?" he asked shortly.

It was a panel portrait of a beautiful woman in widow's weeds. There was a companion one to it of three charming girls, at which Skipton hardly glanced. Young Thurstan followed his look.

"They are all my cousins," he said.

"I used to know that one, I think, once," said the Captain slowly. "Lady Cantley, if I am not mistaken?"

"Yes. Oh! then if you knew Daisy you will not mind writing a letter for me. I've tried, and my hand's so shaky; but I could not bear—if anything happened to me, and she did not hear, she'd break her heart. But you'll write at my dictation, won't you, and then you'll send it with a line of your own afterwards?"

Skipton hesitated.

"Break her heart? Daisy? Was this boy, then, so much to her? Yet how could he refuse?"

"I didn't know that Lady Cantley was a widow?" he said, temporising.

"Yes, just a year. I never mentioned them to you because, of course, one doesn't talk about that sort of thing—unless, indeed, it happens to 'run smooth,' and our 'course' unfortunately hasn't. But if I'd known that you were friends—— Anyway, you will write, won't you? My head is pretty clear now, but I can't tell how long it will last."

"I'll fetch some paper and ink," said Skipton, rising.

"It's all on that table," said the lad, watching him with feverish anxiety.

My Darling,—By the time this reaches you it will be all over with me. I told you in my last that I had fever. Unluckily it's gaining ground, thanks to this awful climate, and I fear the next few days will see me out. I shouldn't mind so much if it wasn't for you. Life is not worth twopence in this country, and yet this is all I have to look forward to, grilling for the next ten years, at least. So much for being a beggarly sub. Perhaps it is for the best, darling; yet, when I think of you, it seems awfully hard luck. Try not to fret too much, and remember I loved you always. The past is ours; nothing can take it from us; and your future is assured to you. You have a happy home,

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and will never want for anything. That's some consolation. Some day we may meet again; for the present, good-bye. I can't write any more—at least, my captain is doing it for me; such a good fellow; be nice to him if you ever have the chance, for my sake. God bless you, my dearest.—Ever your loving THOROLD.

"Is that all?" asked Skipton, grimly.

"Yes," replied the boy; he was faint, and for the next few moments the Captain had no time to think.

Then he put the letter away carefully and waited. What would she think when she read it, he wondered. Would she recognise his writing—this sweet, false woman, who had implied the love for him that she dared not utter seven years ago—the love that he had believed in, the memory of which had sustained him and kept him straight as nothing else could? And now she had forgotten him—if, indeed, she ever really cared—forgotten him for this boy. She had been freed, and now she was free no longer. But with that came the thought that Thorold Thurstan would die, and then he crushed it as unworthy of himself and traitorous to the lad, who had been to him as a younger brother.

. . . . . .

Thorold Thurstan did not die. The next mail brought him news of a large legacy that had been left him unexpectedly, and he got better on the strength of that, as he remembered the happiness it might bring him. Yet it was a very white and shaky specimen of a young soldier that the good ship *Malabar* took home, upon her first return voyage the next trooping season.

As the ship glided in towards Portsmouth Harbour, he and the Captain stood on deck, warmly muffled up, but already enjoying the precarious English sunshine, and eagerly watching every landmark that spoke of that magic word "home."

"By the way, Skipton," said young Thurstan, taking his friend's arm, "what did you do with that letter—the one you wrote for me, you know? I forgot to ask about it since"—with a happy laugh—"I have been able to write myself."

"I have it safe enough. I wouldn't destroy it, lest, in the excess of your jubilation, you did some mad thing that might bring on a relapse, and then it would have come in useful after all."

His chum and Captain entered.

The joke was a bad one, ill-timed, and poor, but Thurstan felt he could afford to laugh at everything.

"Oh, keep it by all means," he rejoined, "keep it and give it to—my little girl the first chance you get."

"I shall probably not see her."

"Why, of course you will. You are not going to desert me, Captain, now, after all you've been to me. I thought you'd stand by me, and be my best man," diffidently.

"No, really, Thurstan, choose someone of your own age," replied the Captain.

The young man laughed.

"Anyway, you must see me through it. I suppose you want to be off to town at once, but you'll stop long enough to see her? You must. I wrote to her that we were coming home together in this ship, and she'll be looking out for us, and think it awfully rude of you if you go off without seeing her. They are sure to be down here—stopping at the Beach Mansions, I expect; that's where George always put up."

"Who is George?"

"Didn't you know him? The late Lord Cantley; so Daisy would be sure to go there. You see, a girl can't go about alone, so her sister would come too; besides, she lives with her at present."

The explanation was not very clear, but Skipton concluded that one of Daisy's younger sisters would be with her as "gooseberry," and he would be wanted to make a fourth, and keep the gooseberry occupied. Well, he was getting hardened, and he thought he might as well go through with it.

"All right, I'll come," he muttered. "But do you think they'll be on the jetty?"

"No. Probably not. Fancy meeting your sweetheart, 'after many days,' in the face of this crowd! Bad enough if it was one's mother or sister; but your own girl—no, thank you!"

All the same, Thurstan was feverishly scanning the welcoming sea of faces. He grew pale with excitement as the trooper was attached to the quay and the gangways let down.

"They are not here," said Skipton at last. "Take a cab and go straight off to the hotel. I'll see to the traps, and come off as soon as I can."

"Here's a letter," replied Thurstan, snatching one from the saloon table, where he had been hastily hunting among the scattered dozens of envelopes. "Yes," he added, reading it, "they are there, both of them, of course—Daisy and Clarice. I'll go; but you'll come, Captain?" doubtfully.

"Give you my word I will. There, be off."

An hour or two later Claude Skipton, a little weary, a little heart-sore, but full of an unselfish sympathy in his friend's happiness, drew up before the door of the Beach Mansions Hotel, and was shown to Lady Cantley's private sitting-room. Her ladyship was alone, and came forward smiling to receive him. Could this be Daisy—this graceful, queenly woman, with a pale, beautiful face, and hair like molten gold? The little Portchester girl he had left behind him had become a regal dame, he thought; and still Thurstan had called her his "little girl!" But as she greeted him with outstretched hands the lily blossomed into the rose, her pale cheeks were dyed with blushes, and no schoolgirl's eyes shone with a more tender light.

"All for him," thought Claude, as he bowed over her hand.

"Thorold told us to expect you. I am so glad that you have come," she said, almost shyly.

He glanced round the room.

"You have seen Thorold?"

"Oh, yes; he is here—in the conservatory with Clarice."

"I have a letter for you, Lady Cantley, which I wrote at his dictation when he was at the worst, and it was not destroyed."

She took it from him and read it slowly.

"But this was meant for Clarice," she said. "Yes. Didn't you know? Thorold and Clarice have been engaged for some time, but they had no prospect of—— Oh, Claude!"

"It was all my stupid mistake," he said, as she laid her head upon his shoulder. "I never thought it could be one of your sisters—not you."

"And I wondered all the time if you were ever coming back!"

. . . . . .

"Thorold," said Claude Skipton, when that young man had proudly presented his Captain to pretty, child-like Clarice, "I've no special objection to being your best man, but it's usual on those occasions to enlist the offices of a bachelor; and as your example is so excellent, I'm going to follow it—or, rather, lead the way; so suppose we reverse the suggestion, and you act as my best man instead. It'll do just as well, as you can get another for yourself."

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A WOMAN'S WILL.

WHERE she came from nobody knew. It was said Dorrick met her at a seaside resort, and that was all anyone seemed to know about her. He married her for her beauty: she married him for his money and social position.

That would have made no difference in the long run, if she had been an ordinary type of fortune-hunter. But she was not. She had gone into the business with her eyes wide open, and thoroughly understood that she had sold herself. She felt her degradation keenly, and within a month from her marriage began to despise herself, and wanted to be free again.

Dorrick, personally, she neither loved nor hated; he was an indulgent husband and a gentleman. But Dorrick in the abstract—the man who stood between her and her self-respect—she hated cordially.

Perhaps the last straw that broke down her endurance was when Dorrick came home tipsy from some club meeting. Dorrick was not a drinking man, and this was an exceptional case. Perhaps he had been drinking too many toasts to his young wife. But it was an offence against good form—the only thing she cared about now. When Dorrick ceased to be a gentleman the last link broke.

"My dear—" he began, and then he stopped short, for he had caught her glance. She had peculiar eyes sometimes—hard, cold, penetrating eyes—gimlet eyes, an irreverent youth had once called them. Dorrick seemed to shrink up within himself beneath her glance. In the condition he was, he seemed fascinated—"like as if he'd been mesmerised," said Mrs. Dorrick's maid under her breath; she had been to see a professional hypnotist a few weeks before. Mrs. Dorrick overheard the remark, and it set her thinking.

The suggestion of mesmerism broke in upon her like a revelation; perhaps she had found the key to freedom. She had heard of this marvellous force that science but dimly comprehends, and she was prepared to believe wonders of it. Forthwith she set about studying it.

Little by little, as she mastered the subject, she came to understand how complete is the control exercised by the mesmerist over his subjects, and found that she herself possessed marked powers of fascination. Then she began to try experiments with her husband. She had no definite end in view. She wanted to gain such mastery over him as to make him entirely subservient to her will. Then she would no longer be galled by the sense that she was part of his property. The end was a foregone conclusion.

She began tentatively. Dorrick developed a habit of dressing a little too lightly for the season of the year, and caught cold several times. His wife scolded him for the carelessness, but to no purpose. Little by little he became more careless. He neglected to see a doctor, after catching a very severe cold, though he had been in the habit of taking the utmost care of his health. Again his wife scolded him, and sent for the doctor herself. Dorrick recovered slowly, but the effects of a severe chill had left him weaker.

Then he committed the crowning imprudence of taking a cold bath in the middle of January, and neglected to thoroughly dry himself. Mrs. Dorrick scolded again, and again summoned the doctor. The doctor was angry, and took Dorrick to task sharply for his carelessness. "It's simple suicide," he said, "simple suicide!" And he left directions for Mrs. Dorrick, and drove away.

He was right; he could do no good; Dorrick had thrown away his life. In about a week he fell a victim to pneumonia, and Mrs. Dorrick was free.

Mrs. Dorrick, the bride of scarce six months, mourned deeply for her husband, and inherited his wealth. Perhaps there was just a little genuineness in her sorrow; a tinge of remorse—but nothing more. To-day she is a leader in society by right of her late husband's name and wealth, her youth, her beauty, and her sorrow. Perhaps she may marry again; this time she will not sell herself—she will not need to. And the man of her choice will be accounted happy; for no one knows of her terrible gift. Perhaps, too, rightly so accounted. Who shall say?

OUT OF RHYME.

I AM a genius. These dolts here say that I am insane. But what do they know of genius?

Bah! it is absurd. It is impossible for me to be a genius and also insane. You know that; you are a well-read man. You can recall the passage, can you not? It proves the sanity of true genius. And I am a true genius.

How do I know? Oh, I have always been a genius.

I knew it first when I began to read books. It said, in the books, that a genius and a poet are born, not made.

Then I knew at once that I was a genius.

Always, I loved poetry. I knew that some day I should write a great poem. I determined to wait for the psychological moment. Meanwhile, I was a genius.

Everything confirmed this. I was an eccentric child, wilful, visionary, whimsical. You remember, do you not, that the books say that genius is eccentric?

Day by day I became a greater genius. I wrote beautiful poems. I dare say you remember them; my name was——

Genius! Genius! It is a beautiful word, is it not?

But the world does not like it. Oh, I knew that.

I have always been a great reader. Perhaps I told you that. And genius always makes every one about it unhappy.

As I grew older I resolved to marry.

I knew we should be unhappy. Men of genius always are. You remember Lord Byron and Carlyle?

We led a miserable existence. Because I was a genius.

I wondered more and more why my genius was not conceded. I had lived up to everything as it is in the books.

I am very fond of those books.

One night I woke up suddenly.

I knew the moment was come. I was going to write my great poem. It was to be a work of infinite genius.

I got up softly and lit the lamp. My wife slept.

Quietly I took up my pen and ink.

There was a beautiful rhythm in my mind.

Then something discordant disturbed me.

Suddenly my eye fell upon my sleeping wife.

Then I knew what had disturbed me.

SHE WAS OUT OF RHYME!

Think of it! I was a poet, and my wife did not rhyme.

For a moment I was stunned. The great poem waited.

I could not go on while she did not rhyme.

If you were a poet you would understand.

I looked at her again and considered.

It was too true. She should have ended with a dactyl; instead, it was an anapæst.

She was not only out of rhyme. She did not scan.

I could bear it no longer. She must be made to rhyme.

I knew just where the fault lay. I cut off her head.

I had to cut more than once, but my razor was strong as well as sharp.

It was so sudden that she only rolled her eyes and groaned.

I did not care for that. I knew that she rhymed now.

Then I dipped my pen into the blood, and continued my poem. Oh, how the genius oozed out of my pen!

The thought, the language, the metre, the rhythm—oh, it was genius! For she was in rhyme now, you know.

So I wrote until morning.

And then, when they came to know why blood flowed under the door, I told them it was rhyme, and showed them the poem.

And they—monstrous!—put me in this place, where they keep saying that I am insane.

If you could only see my poem you would know what I am.

I am not insane. I am a genius.

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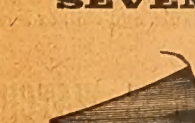

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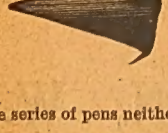

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